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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Letter dated 11 December 1992 from the Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the document entitled "Consensus of Dakar" (see annex), which was adopted by the OAU International Conference on Assistance to African Children, held at Dakar from 25 to 27 November 1992.

I should be grateful if you would have this document circulated as a document of the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly under agenda item 83.

(Signed) Kéba Birane CISSE

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Annex

CONSENSUS OF DAKAR

Organization of African Unity
International Conference on Assistance to African Children
25-27 November 1992

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CONSENSUS OF DAKAR

A Statement by Participants at the Organization of African Unity International Conference on Assistance to African Children, in Dakar (Senegal) 25 – 27 November 1992.

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1. We, the participants from OAU Member States, Industrial and Other Countries, African NGOs, International NGOs, United Nations Agencies, Intergovernmental Organizations, International Financial Institutions and National Committees of UNICEF have gathered in Dakar to reaffirm and further our commitment, as individual countries and collectively, to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the Declaration and the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children. We remain firmly committed to the concept that every child can and must have a better future. We are particularly concerned by the grave and deteriorating situation of children in conflict areas in Africa, by increasing numbers of street children, and by the suffering of handicapped children.

2. We are alarmed and concerned that 200 million people throughout the continent live in absolute poverty. Thirty million African people suffer, mainly women and children, who are victims of natural disasters, war and civil strife. At least 20 million continue to suffer as refugees and displaced persons. Over four and a half million children still die each year, largely from preventable causes. Millions more are denied adequate nutrition, rudimentary health services, clean water, proper sanitation and basic education.

3. The relative low status, lack of education and limited decision-making capacity of women in Africa diminish their opportunity to achieve adequate levels of health, nutrition, income and overall development. These disadvantages have serious consequences for the well–being of Africa's children.

4. A continuation of these conditions is not only morally repugnant but also a threat to peace, prosperity and security throughout an ever more interdependent world. Unless Africa is given additional support enabling it to address its socio-economic problems, particularly those related to children and women, negative consequences for the entire world become inevitable.

5. Recognizing the deteriorating situation and the urgent needs of Africa's children and women and the obligations set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, in June 1991, called for the convening of an International Conference on Assistance to African Children in order to focus more attention on programmes for the survival, protection and development of children.

6. The nations of Africa have entered a period of democratic transition, of greater integration among themselves, and of increasing cooperation with the rest of the world. Positive results have come from the efforts of African countries, their bilateral and multilateral partners, NGOs and others. On the eve of the 21st century, Africa needs now to build the foundation for a more dynamic and sustainable pattern of future development.

7. We are aware of the interdependent nature of the world and recognize that the solution of Africa's underdevelopment and specific measures for addressing the problems of Africa's children, in particular, will require fundamental changes of policy by African governments and renewed commitment of the international community.

8. We firmly believe that the issues of war and peace as well as poverty and development, environmental degradation and ecological renewal are inextricably intertwined. Addressing these problems will require support at the international, continental and regional levels, as a supplement to national and local initiatives and actions.

9. We are concerned that the excruciating debt and debt-servicing burden, the deteriorating terms of trade and cumulative economic difficulties, as well as the effects of Structural Adjustment Programmes in cases where the social dimensions of adjustment have not been adequately addressed, have negatively affected the provision of the basic social needs of African women and children in many African countries. We now call for a more realistic international appreciation and understanding of the situation in Africa. National and international policies and action must harness the newly released hope and energy, translating into reality the concept of 'First Call for Children'. We therefore commit ourselves individually and collectively to the following:

I. NATIONAL PROGRAMMES OF ACTION

10. As part of their commitment to "keep the promise" to Africa's children, and as agreed in the Declaration of the World Summit for Children, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the OAU Resolution on the Implementation of the African Decade for Child Survival, Protection and Development, over 40 African countries have now prepared National Programmes of Action (NPAs). They draw on, and can contribute to, the New Agenda for Africa set out by the General Assembly in 1990, and Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration agreed at the United Nations Conference for Environment and Development in 1992. They can be supported by such groups as the Global Coalition for Africa.

11. These National Programmes of Action are largely directed towards achievement of specific and measurable human goals, through intersectoral collaborative efforts, using low-cost community participatory approaches. Many African countries have already proved accelerated programmes can be achieved by these approaches. The goals cover priority needs in health, nutrition, education, water and environmental sanitation, and children in especially difficult circumstances. They recognize the vital role of women in the development process.

12. The health goals emphasize the need to reduce infant and child mortality rates by a third and to reduce by half the maternal mortality rates between the years 1990 and 2000. The health strategies give priority to increased efficiency in the use and allocation of resources and the importance of strengthening district-level health systems. The responsibility of every family and community for their own health and the catalytic role of village health committees, health workers and traditional birth attendants in supporting these efforts is recognized.

13. In the preparation of NPAs the increased spread of AIDS and tuberculosis should be countered by measures and attention within health and education.

14. Nutrition strategies are directed to reducing severe protein energy malnutrition by half and virtually eliminating key specific nutritional deficiencies. They do this by emphasizing the need to reorient national policies, improving decentralized management and administration, and developing community-based programmes with strong participation by women aimed at improving household food security. In some countries the present drought has triggered a promising response of reviving household level food production, accessibility and preservation.

15. Education strategies in the NPAs are directed towards the provision of education for all and the reduction of illiteracy by half, with special emphasis on the needs of girls, women, and other categories such as abandoned children. The measures include the removal of regional disparities in access to basic education, continued improvement in quality, focusing on the girl child, expanded access to primary schools, and improved teacher training, supervision and conditions of services.

16. To achieve the goals of access of all to clean water and sanitation by the year 2000, the NPAs give emphasis to low-cost and appropriate technologies including improved public awareness, participation of women and the community in the design and construction of water schemes, hygiene education, low-cost latrines, and the maintenance and ownership of systems.

17. Priority actions for children in difficult circumstances include the reduction of violence and aggression, improved greater community support, development of innovative mechanisms, increased public awareness, as well as peace education, a clarification and strengthening of the legal framework for child rights and equal opportunities without discrimination between boys and girls, and elimination of child labour.

18. Most NPAs recognize the vital role of women — as leaders in their societies and communities, as an economic force, and as forerunners to social change, in addition to their role as mothers. Priority actions for women focus on improved health, increased educational opportunities, appropriate technologies to reduce excessive workload, access to credit, income and employment and effective participation of women in decision-making at all levels.

II. PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

19. African countries have committed themselves to the implementation of their National Programmes of Action and, in doing so, have recognized and addressed human development issues as central to national development plans and programmes.

20. In order to make the implementation of National Programmes of Action broad-ranging and effective, it will be necessary to involve a wide spectrum of government agencies, national NGOs, civil organizations, women and children's organizations, professional and religious associations and many segments of the private sector. Countries will need to establish national machinery for overseeing this process, including ensuring adequate planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of action to achieve the NPA objectives. All such institutions represented at the Dakar Conference commit themselves to full participation in this process.

21. Recognizing that action for Africa's children and women must be part of a broader accelerated programme of development and poverty alleviation, African countries and their donor partners,

including international financial institutions, commit themselves jointly to incorporate the National Programmes of Action into their bilateral and multilateral consultative processes and development programmes. African countries further undertake to establish mechanisms for high-level political supervision and monitoring of their National Programmes of Action, and to the mobilization of their own resources to achieve their goals.

22. One possible new means for cooperation in support of National Programmes of Action is that of National Compacts for Children. National Compacts for Children would establish a moral and political commitment to provide adequate and reliable resources by all parties concerned in order to secure steady progress towards the achievement of national goals for children. A National Compact would fully take into account established bilateral and multilateral mechanisms and programmes and would indeed seek to complement them. All participants in Dakar commit themselves to explore ways of developing National Compacts for Children as a innovative mechanism for cooperation in the implementation of the National Programmes of Action.

III. CHILDREN IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

23. Armed conflicts have increased in Africa. The number of African countries caught up in wars and civil strife has tragically grown. Children and women have become the main victims. Moreover, many children are in difficult circumstances. These include children who are abused, exploited, disabled, orphaned, neglected, or in prison. Some are refugees, others are victims of AIDS. There is a need for urgent humanitarian assistance even during armed conflict, as well as political support for the resolution of conflicts. African countries commit themselves to this and welcome the support of donor countries. Even during these conflicts, there is a need for urgent humanitarian assistance as well as political support for the resolution of conflicts. African countries commit themselves to this and welcome the support of donor countries.

24. African countries accept and affirm that they have the primary responsibility for resolving conflicts in Africa. They have already committed themselves to "work together towards the peaceful resolution of all the conflicts on our continent" as stipulated in the Declaration adopted in 1990 by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Change Taking Place in the World. In this context the prevention of the conscription of children under 15 years of age, as a principle of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, should be underlined.

25. A new effort is required to undertake political initiatives towards the resolution, management and prevention of conflicts in Africa. African countries further commit themselves to the universal application of the principles of international humanitarian law on the protection of civilian persons in times of war, through the adoption of special measures such as ensuring safe passage by children and women away from zones of conflict. Furthermore, African countries commit themselves to exert all possible influence on parties in armed conflicts to guarantee safe and free passage of humanitarian relief aid to innocent victims, especially to women and children, in particular for the establishment of 'days of tranquillity' for the rapid delivery of humanitarian assistance.

26. African countries call for global respect for the principle that the resolution of conflicts shall not be a precondition for the provision of humanitarian relief and assistance, and instead that political and humanitarian actions with regard to conflicts be taken simultaneously, while recognizing the necessity for Africa and the OAU to exert all efforts in conflict resolution as a priority.

IV. GIRL CHILDREN AND WOMEN

27. Recognizing the special needs of girl children, the special roles of women and the need for ending gender discrimination from the earliest years if girls are to be given the opportunity to reach their full potential, we commit ourselves to:

(i) Increase national and international resources to meet girls' and women's needs.
(ii) Strengthen mechanisms for the promotion of women and children to coordinate and monitor efforts for the advancement of women and the girl child.
(iii) Review and reform legal codes and legislation to remove all gender biases.
(iv) Increase the representation of women at the highest policy-making levels to ensure articulation of the needs of girls and women and to defend their interests.

28. Furthermore we commit ourselves to ensure the protection of the female child from all forms of harmful traditional practices and in particular to the elimination of such practices as female genital mutilation, and early and forced marriages.

V. MOBILIZING AND RESTRUCTURING RESOURCES

29. Implementation of the NPAs will require mobilization of additional resources in the 1990s at national and international levels.

At National Level

30. African countries commit themselves to priority action to meet basic needs of children and women. This will include:

(i) Adoption of specific goals for achieving by end-1995 a priority list of low-cost achievable goals for children and women, from the core adopted at the World Summit for Children, with special attention to those immediate and decade goals dependent primarily on social mobilization and national leadership rather than on major additional financial resources (for example, achievement by 1995 of 90 per cent measles and tetanus toxoid immunization, 80 per cent oral rehydration therapy, universal iodized salt and reduction by half of the gender gap in primary education).
(ii) The principle of first call on available resources to meet the basic needs of women and children will be carried forward by restructuring allocations of government resources to favour child survival, protection and development and to support the key goals for children and women in particular.
(iii) Reallocation within existing social sector budgets and/or a shift of resources away from non-productive uses, such as military/internal security expenditures and subsidies for inefficient parastatals.
(iv) An increase of domestic resource mobilization needs to be supported through other actions, such as national tax reform and the encouragement of community actions and contributions.

At Continental Level

31. Participants at the Dakar Conference recognize the need to complement action at national level by supportive action by African institutions including economic communities, financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and other regional development partners. The scale and complexity of action required is such that all such African institutions will need to play a role in alleviating the plight of African children.

32. Regional Economic Communities have a special potential for developing and implementing National Programmes of Action for African children, in areas of common and cross-border interests — such as desertification, and the control or elimination of such diseases as malaria, measles, poliomyelitis, tuberculosis, guinea worm, cholera and AIDS — as a complement to efforts at the national level. They can thus provide important support for National Programmes of Action and National Compacts for Children. Participants call upon the international community, research institutions, UN Agencies and NGOs to assist African countries at national, subregional and continental levels in combating these and other related diseases and practices.

At International Level

33. Donor partners and international financial institutions, in their cooperative programmes with African countries, recognize the opportunity to support the objectives and strategies developed in the National Programmes of Action. In view of the critical situation, facing African children, they commit themselves to make every effort to expand official development assistance (ODA) and promote debt cancellation or relief for African countries, especially in support of African actions directed at child survival, protection and development, in line with the goals of the World Summit for Children. To this end, particular support should be extended to the Least Developed African countries.

34. African countries and their donor country partners commit themselves to encourage the international financial institutions and development institutions to give greater priority to Africa's overall development in their assistance programmes and, in particular, to provide greater levels of support for development to meet priority human needs.

35. Donor and international financial institutions also commit themselves to:

(i) Explore short-, medium- and long-term commitments of resources to support health, nutrition, basic education, water and sanitation as set out in specific sector(s) and subsector(s) of National Programmes of Action.

(ii) Increase and sustain the share of ODA commitment to social priority sectors by 1995 in line with increasing commitments by African countries to sectors such as basic education, primary health care, low-cost water and sanitation systems, responsible parenthood and family planning, nutrition programmes, bearing in mind the level of 20% of total ODA for these sectors, recommended in UNDP's *Human Development Report* for 1992.

(iii) Take into account human indicators in the allocation of resources at bilateral and multilateral negotiations.

(iv) Formulate debt relief and conversion schemes in ways that make possible increased budget allocations and renewed economic growth, with at least part of the benefits being used to advance programmes for children. 'Debt relief for children' including debt swaps for investment in social development programmes have been used on a small but encouraging scale since the World Summit for Children and should now be much more actively considered by debtors and creditors. Such schemes should be considered on a case-by-case basis reflecting the macroeconomic conditions of the country concerned.

(v) Increase support for regional, national and local research, technology and adaption in favour of child-oriented programmes.

(vi) Support those catalytic areas of social sector development identified in the illustrative programme approaches.

36. Participants noted the following proposals to enhance Africa's capacity to mobilize resources for the implementation of social programmes in the 1990s:

(i) The cancellation of the major portion of foreign debt.

(ii) The freeing of aid for children from conditionality linked to political considerations.
(iii) The removal or softening of cost recovery requirements with respect to primary health care and basic education.
(iv) The increase of assistance to child refugees and AIDS orphans.

VI. GOALS AND TARGETS

37. The National Programmes of Action contain overall goals for child survival, development and protection that derive from those articulated at the World Summit for Children. From among those goals, the countries of Africa pledge at this Dakar Conference to attain a set of intermediate targets by the end of 1995. These are to:

(i) Raise Africa's average immunization coverage level from the 75 per cent achieved for the Universal Child Immunization (UCI) effort to 80 per cent against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, poliomyelitis and tuberculosis.
(ii) Ensure 90 per cent of coverage against measles, by far the most lethal of the vaccine-preventable diseases, and of tetanus toxoid for women of child-bearing age.
(iii) Achieve 80 per cent usage of oral rehydration therapy in order to prevent dehydration caused by diarrhoea.
(iv) Virtually eliminate iodine deficiency disorders.
(v) Virtually eliminate vitamin A deficiency and its consequences.
(vi) Encourage exclusive breastfeeding for four to six months and sustain breastfeeding for up to two years of age and beyond, with complementary foods beginning at four to six months.

38. The above goals are for the most part low cost, thus within the capacity of virtually every country in Africa with a modest level of external support. Their achievement depends primarily on a strong political commitment at the highest level and widespread social mobilization within families and communities.

39. Five of the major goals will require in most countries sustained action over a longer period and greater resource mobilization for their full achievement. These are therefore focused on the year 2000 and include:

(i) Ensuring universal access to basic education, and achievement of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary school age children, with special attention to the enrolment of girls.
(ii) Reducing severe protein energy malnutrition by half and the achievement of household food security.
(iii) Achieving universal access to clean water and safe excreta disposal in all communities, urban and rural.
(iv) Reducing infant and under-five mortality by one third.
(v) Reducing maternal mortality by half.
(vi) Reducing the number and alleviating the suffering of children in especially difficult circumstances including special support for disabled and orphaned children, and protection of children against all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation including exploitative work circumstances.
(vii) Ensuring ratification in all African countries of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as legislation incorporating its provisions in national statutes.

40. Mobilization of additional resources will be needed towards their most basic goals. African governments and donor governments commit themselves to renewed efforts to achieve this. Any delay in postponing the achievement of their goals also postpones the achievement of many other gains in human

welfare and development dependent on them, notably increasing well-being among children and women, reducing population growth and accelerating moves to more rapid and sustainable economic development.

41. The NPAs can be used to carry forward action towards that these goals in several ways. They need to be translated into district and village or urban programmes of practical action to ensure their implementation at a decentralized level. The NPAs can also be used in Consultative Groups or Round-table meetings to help mobilize international support for national action towards the goals.

VII. MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP

42. The participants at the Dakar Conference recognize the need for capacity-building and action-oriented follow-up mechanisms at national, subregional, regional, continental and international levels to implement the commitments of the Dakar Conference. To this end, the participants request the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity to assume the leadership role in the implementation of the Dakar Consensus, with the support of UNICEF, the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank and other relevant organizations to assess, monitor and report regularly to the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government on actions taken at national, subregional, regional and international levels to further social and human development in Africa.

43. In this regard, we call for the establishment of a continental follow-up mechanism under the auspices of the OAU, with the support of UNICEF, ECA, ADB and all other UN agencies. This mechanism will monitor, review and appraise the overall formulation and implementation of National Programmes of Action and submit progress reports to the Assembly of Heads and Government of the Organization of African Unity.

44. We also call upon the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity to present the Consensus of Dakar to the Twenty-Ninth Assembly of Heads of State and Government for endorsement and further call upon the Secretary-General of the United Nations to report on the follow-up to the Conference as part of his report to the General Assembly on the follow up to the World Summit for Children.

VIII. COMMITMENT

45. Progress for Africa's children requires political action at the highest level, within Africa and within the international community. We are determined to take that action. The Dakar Conference has provided a new commitment and a new opportunity for building country-by-country on National Programmes of Action for Children. We recognize the vital need for rebuilding the human foundations of Africa to provide a basis for economic and social development in the 21st century. As we leave Dakar, we urge individuals, governments, organizations and community groups in Africa and beyond to take up the challenge, to help Africa respond to the needs of its children and, in so doing, guarantee a better future for Africa's children in this century and beyond.

27 November 1992